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# Thy Word Is Still Truth: Essential Writings on the Doctrine of Scripture from the Reformation to Today

Peter A. Lillback

Richard B. Gaffin Jr.

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## Recommended Citation

Lillback, Peter A. and Gaffin, Richard B. Jr., "Thy Word Is Still Truth: Essential Writings on the Doctrine of Scripture from the Reformation to Today" (2013). *Alumni Book Gallery*. 305.  
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# Thy Word Is Still Truth: Essential Writings on the Doctrine of Scripture from the Reformation to Today

**Keywords**

Bible, doctrine

**Disciplines**

Biblical Studies | Religion | Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion

**Publisher**

P & R Publishing

**Publisher's Note**

Reprinted from *Thy Word Is Still Truth: Essential Writings on the Doctrine of Scripture from the Reformation to Today* edited by Peter A. Lillback and Richard B. Gaffin Jr., copyright 2013, P&R Publishing, Phillipsburg, NJ.

**ISBN**

9781596384477

THY WORD  
IS STILL  
TRUTH

ESSENTIAL WRITINGS on the  
DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE  
from the REFORMATION to TODAY



EDITED BY

PETER A. LILLBACK & RICHARD B. GAFFIN JR.



“Within the ultramodern secular cultural environment, with its emphasis on relativism, its lack of idealism, its reluctance to commitment, and its disrespect toward authority and the sacred, *Thy Word Is Still Truth* represents a major theological landmark. It reminds the church of the rich and significant heritage that we can draw on, going back not only to the Reformation but also to the early church fathers—a heritage that is deeply rooted in the apostolic faith. This book emphasizes the amazing theological unity, diversity, and coherence of the biblical doctrine of the Word of God. It underscores the relevance of Reformed faith as ‘a living tradition engaging with the pressing questions of today.’ Edited within a specific historical context, this anthology on the authority and interpretation of Scripture speaks eloquently and boldly to the whole of the contemporary church of Jesus Christ.”

—**Pierre Berthoud**, Professor Emeritus, Faculté Jean Calvin, Aix-en-Provence, France;  
President, Fellowship of European Evangelical Theologians

“Against those who think a ‘high’ view of Scripture was the creation of nineteenth-century Princetonians, and against those who think such a view of Scripture amounts to a defensive posture devoid of profound theological reflection, this excellent volume is a much-needed resource. It stands as a bulwark against every form of the question, ‘Did God really say?’ The excerpts and essays drawn from Martin Luther to the present represent an immense reservoir of diverse reflections—from Calvin’s *Institutes* to Monod’s *Farewell*, from Owen, Turretin, Gaussen, and Edwards to Spurgeon, Hengstenberg, and Machen, from Reformed confessions to the advent of contemporary biblical theology. Although this collection includes statements on recent controversies at Westminster Theological Seminary, its strength is not its coverage of the last half-century but its ample demonstration that today’s Reformed Christians find themselves, on this subject, within a heritage rich in theological reflection and powerful synthesis. To lose sight of this heritage or to stand aloof from it is to impoverish our souls and to distance ourselves from the God who ‘looks’ to those who are contrite and humble in spirit and who tremble at his Word.”

—**D. A. Carson**, Research Professor of New Testament, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois

“Lillback and Gaffin have assembled a trove of resources that will enable serious students of Scripture to mine the wealth of the church’s testimony on one of the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith—the doctrine of Scripture, which proclaims the abiding truthfulness and inerrancy of the Word of God. *Thy Word Is Still Truth* offers a scholarly exploration from a great cloud of witnesses that is historical, exegetical, and theological, yet eminently practical and hence immensely beneficial. This volume will serve the church for generations to come.”

—**J. V. Fesko**, Academic Dean and Professor of Systematic and Historical Theology,  
Westminster Seminary California



“Since its founding in 1929, Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia has specialized in the doctrine of Scripture. Nearly everyone who has taught there over the years has made some contribution to the subject. The Westminster faculty published three collections of essays on Scripture: *The Infallible Word* (1946), *Scripture and Confession* (1973), and *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic* (1988). The present volume, however, is a contribution of a higher order. It not only republishes some of the best articles from the previous collections, but contains important writings on biblical authority from the Reformation and post-Reformation periods (including the churches’ creedal statements) down to the present day. There are articles from the faculty of Old Princeton, from which Westminster takes its bearings, articles on controversial matters, and articles describing the rationale for Westminster’s distinctive emphasis on biblical theology. And the volume is honest in facing up to the recent controversy over Scripture at Westminster itself and the seminary’s forthright response reaffirming biblical inerrancy. Throughout the years, I have been moved again and again by Westminster’s willingness to stand against the world and for the Word of God. The issue before the world today, as in the garden of Eden, is ‘Has God said?’ I know of no body of literature that can be of more help to people wrestling with this vital question.”

—**John M. Frame**, J. D. Trimble Chair of Systematic Theology and Philosophy, Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando

“Every generation of Christians must anew believe, confess, understand, and live out the Bible’s teaching that it is the inerrant Word of God. This timely book brings together many invaluable historic and contemporary writings that will encourage us to defend and cherish the Scriptures. It will certainly be a great blessing to those who study it.”

—**W. Robert Godfrey**, President and Professor of Church History, Westminster Seminary California

“In every generation it is required of the church (and its institutions) to defend and maintain its commitment to the Scriptures as God’s Word written. Given the current climate in which pastors and scholars choose to ignore confessional boundaries and recast the faith to suit contemporary predilections, it is vital to establish that the trustworthiness of Scripture is an essential component of historic Christian orthodoxy and the foundational assumption of the Reformed tradition. No branch of the church has been as clearheaded and warmhearted in its defense and articulation of the riches and integrity of the Bible as the Reformed branch. And no seminary has been quite as clear or committed to the primacy of that Word in all its academic branches as Westminster Theological Seminary, following in the tradition of Old Princeton.

“This book invites us to review the rich legacy of the church, Westminster’s place in that tradition, and the necessity of reasserting this conviction for the health of the church and the cure of souls. I cannot stress enough my gratitude to God that Westminster continues to assert this truth in the clearest and most unambiguous manner.”

—**Liam Goligher**, Senior Minister, Tenth Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia

“Where do you go to learn what the Reformers and post-Reformation orthodoxy have to say about the Scriptures? Where do you procure a selection of relevant passages that span a few centuries and yet agree about the truth and the nature of scriptural revelation? Where can you find an anthology that shows the roots of Westminster Theological Seminary’s core relationship to scriptural revelation, as well as the contours of a beautiful struggle to remain faithful to that tradition? Now here is a bird’s-eye perspective in one volume. Kudos to Richard B. Gaffin and Peter A. Lillback for giving us something so good! This remarkable selection of key authors and passages shares the theme that for many of us is both a passion and an urgent necessity: the Word is still true and it is still truth. Please do not overlook this work.”

—**Davi Charles Gomes**, Chancellor, Mackenzie Presbyterian University, São Paulo, Brazil

“This is a unique anthology. It gathers material from the Reformation to the present day on the doctrine of Scripture, and does so in keeping with the historical position of Westminster Theological Seminary. The selection is far-reaching, and the addition of a section on biblical theology is an excellent decision. A superb resource has now been provided by this volume.”

—**Allan M. Harman**, Research Professor, Presbyterian Theological College, Melbourne, Australia

“The affirmation of the epistemological heart of the Christian faith in the Reformation watchcry of *sola Scriptura* necessarily entailed what the generations since the apostles had believed in, namely, the infallible nature of the Bible. Since the battles of the Reformation, this truth about God’s Word has come under attack again and again—whether it be from Quaker enthusiasm, deistic rationalism, or liberal Protestantism—and only when this truth has been ardently defended have the fires of Christian piety continued to burn brightly. This tremendous collection of sources about the infallibility and inerrancy of the Scriptures is both a powerful reminder of these facts and a stirring impetus to be ‘a people of the Book.’ Wrought in recent conflict over this very issue, this volume is a welcome addition to the key reference works of all those who genuinely desire to be Christ-centered and gospel-focused.”

—**Michael A. G. Haykin**, Professor of Church History and Biblical Spirituality and Director of the Andrew Fuller Center for Baptist Studies at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“This new anthology of the writings of Reformed thinkers on the infallibility and the inerrancy of Scripture, from the Reformation era to today, is timely and beneficial. Building on the title of E. J. Young’s classic book *Thy Word Is Truth*, this collection is committed to the highest view of Scripture. And it affirms Scripture’s truthfulness and trustworthiness, which are of crucial importance for the life of the church, her mission to the world, and the state of believers’ souls. Reading this collection of contemporary texts, which reflects Westminster Theological Seminary’s strong commitment to Scripture, one knows without a doubt that

by the providence of God, Westminster has been faithful to and consistent with the historic Reformed theological and confessional tradition on the doctrine of Scripture. Through Peter Lillback and Richard Gaffin's masterful work, readers are equipped not only to profit from God's Word but also to defend and affirm its perfection."

—**Benyamin F. Intan**, President, International Reformed Evangelical Seminary, Jakarta, Indonesia

"Every one of the chapters in this book sounds a solid teaching note on how evangelical theology came to the positions it currently holds. Many among our younger scholars and church members will be richly rewarded as they trace the history of how the Spirit of God led his church in these essays and through these scholars, who fully trusted what God had said in his Word. It is a joy to commend this volume to a wide reading audience."

—**Walter C. Kaiser Jr.**, President Emeritus, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, Massachusetts

"The authority and inerrancy of the Bible should be objectively defended with as many historically authoritative sources as possible in order to counter evil powers today that attempt to destroy our faith in God and his Word. This book is a collection of the most authoritative literature on the Scriptures from the Reformation period up to the present day. It will prove to be an essential resource for those who want to apply and defend the Bible."

—**In Whan Kim**, Former President and Professor of Old Testament Studies, Emeritus, Chongshin University and Seminary, Seoul, South Korea

"*Thy Word Is Still Truth* is the definitive A-to-Z resource—historically rooted and biblically informed—on the doctrine of Scripture. It pulls together a wide array of writings into one convenient, comprehensive volume, and the result is a book that seems destined to become one of the best resources available for today's church, which finds herself in the midst of controversy on the view of Scripture."

—**Sam Ko**, Director of Global Ministries, SaRang Community Church, Seoul, South Korea; Chairman of the Board of Trustees, Wales Evangelical School of Theology, Bridgend, UK

"This magisterial anthology of important texts edited by Peter A. Lillback and Richard B. Gaffin Jr., respectively President and Professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary, stands in the grand tradition of biblical inerrancy espoused by Reformed theology for centuries and particularly for the past 85 years by Westminster. The title (without the *Still*) recalls the profoundly significant impact of the work by E. J. Young, one that shaped the thinking of many a budding theologian a half century ago, including this writer. Modernity, and especially Post-modernity, has generated the need for a reassessment and reaffirmation of the doctrine of biblical inerrancy because of its foundational



underpinning to the whole corpus of biblical authority, reliability, and theology. Lillback and Gaffin have risen to the call and have led the way here to a renaissance of the views of the founders of the Seminary and their adherence to the sacred Scriptures that undergirded their potent and cherished Reformed faith.”

—**Eugene H. Merrill**, Distinguished Professor of Old Testament Studies, Dallas Theological Seminary

“The first great lie of the deceiver was to question the Word of God (Gen. 3:1: ‘Indeed, has God said?’). Since then, and mankind’s tragic fall resulting from disobedience to the Word of the Lord, the attack on the inerrant and the infallible, self-attesting Word of the living God has continued unabated, and has, in fact, intensified. Seminaries—literally, the *seed-bed* for pastors—have always been ‘high-value’ strategic fronts on which the enemy of God has launched his familiar, deadly assault. Each generation not only endures those insidious attacks, but also produces lost would-be soldiers of the cross, seducing and corrupting the minds of men to deny the mind of God. Such examples of treason have sad and regrettable consequences for those who surrender to the siren song of hell, ‘Did God say?’ Pastors have left seminaries and Bible colleges where this deadly chemical cloud of doubt in the Bible has drifted into their being, carried the hideous virus infecting their own souls into previously godly pulpits, and communicated its deadly effects to their poor parishioners. From that spreading disease of doubt in God’s Word, once-faithful denominations rot from within, and once-flourishing cultures are infected and die.

“What is needed now, in Old Christendom, New Christendom, and the Next Christendom, and in every generation, is a strong and noble stand for the Word of God in the seminary. For this reason, I am thankful for *Thy Word Is Still Truth*, and I praise God for the incredible labors and dedicated scholarship of Westminster Theological Seminary, her Bible-loving board, her Scripture-saturated faculty and staff, her Word-loving students and supporters, and the trusted editors of this great anthology, Drs. Richard Gaffin and Peter Lillback. They have done what Westminster Theological Seminary has always done so well: leading the church (and stirring her sister seminaries) back to the confessional standards, to the timeless river of orthodoxy that flows from the testimonies of the Reformers’ ‘rediscovery of the written Word of God,’ on through the tributaries of the great Reformed confessions that followed, eventually nourishing the faithful fields of stalwart theological timber—from the Old Princetonians to Edward J. Young and younger living branches such as John Frame, and, of course, Drs. Gaffin and Lillback themselves. This glorious river of confessional orthodoxy not only demolishes the idols of doubt concerning the very Word of God as it rushes down through the ages, but also ushers in soul-refreshment and living water for the people of God. The cleansing that this book brings comes, mercifully, at a time when we need it most.

“I thank almighty God for this magnificent volume. There are few books of which it can be said, ‘This is a comprehensive presentation of the subject.’ Yet I can say without reservation

or hyperbole that this new anthology by P&R Publishing, edited by my esteemed colleagues at Westminster Seminary, is exactly that: a comprehensive presentation of the witness of the Reformed churches, with her finest pastor-scholars and her most radically biblical councils testifying in succeeding ages to the veracity and the life-and-death importance underscored in the title: *Thy Word Is Still Truth*.”

—**Michael A. Milton**, Chancellor and Chief Executive Officer and James M. Baird Jr.  
Chair of Pastoral Theology, Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando

“We have needed this book for a long time. In *Thy Word Is Still Truth*, Peter Lillback and Richard Gaffin have drawn together the comprehensive witness of the church on behalf of the total truthfulness and inerrancy of Scripture. No serious reader can doubt the case for inerrancy made so consistently and clearly in these pages, and no serious defender of Scripture can be without this vital volume that amounts to the most massive arsenal of documentation for the inerrancy of Scripture ever assembled in a single book.”

—**R. Albert Mohler Jr.**, President, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky

“The embattled title casts this book as an apologia for Westminster Seminary’s stand in a recent internal debate. Yes, it is all of that, but it is a great deal more. It is a massive array of extracts from major writers over five centuries, demonstrating both the breadth, strength, clarity, humility, and rootedness of international Reformed bibliography according to its historic confessional self-understanding, and also the insightful energy with which Westminster’s own scholars have labored to vindicate the Reformed position as catholic Christian truth. The book excels as a resource for study and a witness to Westminster’s integrity.”

—**J. I. Packer**, Board of Governors’ Professor of Theology, Regent College, Vancouver, British Columbia

“*Thy Word Is Still Truth* is an invaluable resource that upholds the inerrancy, inspiration, and final authority of Holy Scripture. Not only does it gather together the overwhelming testimony of the Reformed tradition for the Bible’s inerrancy, it also brilliantly addresses matters of special concern today, such as canon formation and redemptive-historical interpretation. With this volume, Westminster Theological Seminary reassumes its position as the leading proponent of the historic Reformed doctrine of Scripture.”

—**Richard D. Phillips**, Senior Minister, Second Presbyterian Church, Greenville, South Carolina

“Westminster Theological Seminary was established in no small part to faithfully uphold a robust doctrine of biblical inerrancy informed by the scriptural doctrine of inspiration. This doctrine, initially communicated to the public by the work of Dr. E. J. Young in *Thy*

*Word Is Truth*, has now been bolstered by a marvelous and needed volume, *Thy Word Is Still Truth*. Through the capable leadership and editorial work of Dr. Peter Lillback and Dr. Richard Gaffin, we now have a readable treasury of biblical expositions and sermons, as well as a thoughtful collection of articles and other works, that have effectively defended the reliability of God's Word as truth from the Reformation to the present. This volume is an indispensable resource both for research and for life-changing devotional reading in light of the renewed assault on the trustworthiness of God's Word in our day."

—**Harry L. Reeder III**, Senior Pastor/Teacher, Briarwood Presbyterian Church, Birmingham, Alabama

"This massive compendium is what it claims to be: a collection of essential writings on the doctrine of Scripture from the time of the Protestant Reformation right up to the present day. The evangelical theology of Scripture that emerged with particular clarity during the Reformation in Europe has enjoyed widespread international influence ever since. The creeds, confessions, sermons, essays, treatises, and personal testimonies in this anthology demonstrate astonishing consistency and remarkable progress across half a millennium of church history. Here, for the first time, a five-hundred-year library of thoughtful, faithful reflection on the nature of biblical truth has been gathered into a single indispensable volume."

—**Philip G. Ryken**, President, Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois

"The Reformation was spurred by Luther's return to the Bible as the highest authority in the church, the doctrine of the infallibility of Scripture has been taught in all evangelical confessions and denominations, and its development has been influenced by people from many confessions. Even so, it was the Reformed doctrine of Scripture, spreading from Switzerland, that became central to evangelicalism through the centuries, both in its terminology and in its manner of defense. For example, Calvin's application of the inner witness of the Holy Spirit to the doctrine of Scripture, declaring that the final evidence for Scripture as the Word of God comes from its Author, the Holy Spirit, directly to the believer's heart, has been central in the evangelical movement and has counteracted any impersonal approach to hermeneutics. No wonder, then, that Reformed seminaries have been at the forefront of formulating, developing, and defending the doctrine of Scripture. I am glad that Westminster Theological Seminary takes the lead again by gathering five hundred years of good tradition, proving how the old truth has been applied to ever-new ages again and again."

—**Thomas Schirrmacher**, Chairman, Theological Commission of World Evangelical Alliance; President, Martin Bucer Theological Seminary, Bonn, Zurich, Innsbruck, Prague, Istanbul, São Paulo

"This is a magnificent and unique sourcebook containing original texts and their fine translations. These testimonies on the divine character of Scripture demonstrate that despite the

variety of Protestant Reformers, synods, and theologians, there was, is, and can be unity because of the common basis in the Word of God.”

—**Herman Selderhuis**, Professor of Church History, Theological University Apeldoorn, The Netherlands; Director, Refo500

“When the Reformation reclaimed the historic apostolic tradition concerning Scripture as the inerrant and infallible Word of God, it became incumbent upon God’s faithful people to build bridges of biblical continuity from generation to generation. This anthology of the Reformation heritage points to this faithfulness for our global Christianity. In our contemporary cosmic hostility to the gospel, *Thy Word Is Still Truth* is a timely reminder of the history of Christian faith as it stands on the abiding power of Scripture as the infallible Word of God that demands our total allegiance.”

—**Philip Tachin**, Senior Lecturer in Systematic Theology, Theological College of Northern Nigeria, Jos, Nigeria

“In light of recent criticisms of the doctrine of biblical inerrancy, a reader containing some of the most important writings on the issue is very welcome. From Luther to familiar names of our own time (Murray, Gaffin, Ferguson), the editors have carefully assembled (with brief introductory comments) all the essential material. Reading this volume is a bit like discovering solid granite beneath our home. Reading through this volume, our confidence in Scripture’s unassailable trustworthiness as the Word of God, infallible and inerrant, is greatly enhanced.”

—**Derek W. H. Thomas**, Professor of Systematic and Historical Theology, Reformed Theological Seminary, Atlanta; Minister of Preaching and Teaching, First Presbyterian Church, Columbia, South Carolina

“The consistent spirit of Reformed tradition in holding the absolute and profound belief in Scripture as the true truth of the true revelation of the true God must be deeply and universally appreciated by all men in all times. To believe that God has unmistakably revealed his perfect will to men of all ages is an absolute necessity for those who truly understand and are totally obedient to the only true God. This kind of belief is sorely needed in our time of pluralism and uncertainty that is leading our society to nowhere. We thank God for the appearance of this monumental work in this crucial time.”

—**Stephen Tong**, Evangelist at Large; Founder, International Reformed Evangelical Seminary, Jakarta, Indonesia

“The contemporary Christian is constantly told, ‘Compromise or you’ll have no place in today’s world.’ This compendium of historic Reformed theological and confessional traditions eloquently testifies that we don’t have to yield to such urgings. It is heartwarming to be able to hold in one volume the Reformed faith’s critical engagement with pressing questions

through the ages. I sincerely hope that with the publication of this volume, the rediscovery of biblical authority in the Reformed traditions, which it encapsulates, will be made accessible to the world, thereby expanding the church's understanding of biblical authority. This will be one way of ensuring that the hold that the global south is taking of Christ will not be an ephemeral one. This volume could not have come at a more auspicious time; I recommend it wholeheartedly."

—**Cephas T. A. Tushima**, Dean, Evangelical Churches of West Africa Theological Seminary, Jos, Nigeria; Secretary, Continuing Theological Engagement of the Lausanne Movement, Nigeria

"The title *Thy Word Is Still Truth* speaks for itself in a profound way. It expresses both the scriptural foundation and the Reformed position of Westminster Theological Seminary. The authority of the Scripture, the Holy Bible, is frequently questioned today by the liberal seminaries and technological and scientific institutions across the world. This book echoes the apologetic stand not only of the seminary but also of Christendom as a whole. 'Thy word is *still* truth' should be the position of every committed Christian at all times. The work is a massive collection of extracts from Christian scholars and godly men over five centuries who held the principle of *sola Scriptura*, the mandate of the Christian life. The undiluted position to vindicate the Reformed position of bibliology is repeatedly affirmed in this book, which was the attraction and the strong imprint placed on me by Westminster Seminary through my professors Richard B. Gaffin and Peter Lillback. The integrity of this seminary among other seminaries is its commitment to the Word of God. *Thy Word Is Still Truth* challenges the nonfoundational postmodernism of today. Every committed Christian and student of the Scripture must have this book, along with the Word of God."

—**T. P. Varghese**, Principal, Bethel Bible College, Punalur, Kerala, India

"Books that are born in the cradle of controversy are usually books worth having on your shelf. *Thy Word Is Still Truth* proves this point beyond a shadow of a doubt. The genesis of this anthology can be traced back to Westminster Seminary's recent debates on the doctrine of Scripture. Now we can all benefit from what was learned through the process. The covers of this book hold together a veritable cornucopia of insights from top-notch theologians—both past and present—all united in one laudable aim: upholding the authority and clarity of the Holy Scriptures as God's inspired Word. Pick it up and read. You'll be simultaneously instructed and edified."

—**Jason P. Van Vliet**, Professor of Dogmatics, Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary, Hamilton, Ontario

"Recent controversies on the doctrine of Scripture, both within and without Westminster Theological Seminary, have forced the seminary to define its position. This compendium is

an attempt to put the present position of Westminster in the context of the historic Reformed position, both as originally formulated and as re-expressed in terms of later issues. Aside from its value to Westminster, this volume documents the continuity and the diversity of British and Continental thinking on Scripture as those streams have impacted the current Westminster position.”

—**Noel Weeks**, Senior Lecturer in Ancient History and Associate of the Department of Classics and Ancient History, University of Sydney

“A magnificent compendium! It has drawn from the best, the truest, and the deepest works on, and affirmations about, the doctrine of Scripture. We need to hear these voices from our past. They are wise, discerning, and profound.”

—**David F. Wells**, Distinguished Research Professor, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, Massachusetts

“This encyclopedic collection does remarkable service to the Reformed faith. In this fine bouquet, the hue and the scent of each flower contribute to the beauty of the ensemble. It will be valuable for those who want to admire the prime blooms, but even more it bears witness to the field where they were gathered. In a day of historical amnesia, we are reminded of the truth that cannot and must not be forgotten.”

—**Paul Wells**, Adjunct Dean, Faculté Jean Calvin, Aix-en-Provence, France; Editor, *La Revue Réformée*; Director, Greenwich School of Theology, Clarbrough, Retford, UK

“Can the church in the West find its bearings and return to God? Only if it finds the grace to dethrone the zeitgeist and re-enthroned the Lord and Holy Scripture, which reveals him. This volume is a manual for that enterprise. It is a sourcebook, history review, theology course, and exegesis guide all rolled into one. It should be required for seminary students, acquired by all pastors, and desired by anyone seeking to walk in the steps of the One who modeled and taught reverence for what we call the Bible as the foundation for valid knowledge as well as saving faith (John 17:17; 1 John 2:6).”

—**Robert W. Yarbrough**, Professor of New Testament, Covenant Theological Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri



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ESSENTIAL WRITINGS on the  
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PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

**R&R**  
P U B L I S H I N G  
P.O. BOX 817 • PHILLIPSBURG • NEW JERSEY 08865-0817

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Scripture references are from the translations in which they were quoted in the original publications of the texts found in this anthology.

Printed in the United States of America

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Thy word is still truth : essential writings on the doctrine of scripture from the reformation to today / edited by Peter A. Lillback and Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.

pages cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-59638-447-7 (cloth)

1. Bible--Evidences, authority, etc.--History of doctrines. 2. Reformed Church--Doctrines. 3. Westminster Theological Seminary (Philadelphia, Pa.) I. Lillback, Peter A. II. Gaffin, Richard B.

BS480.T525 2013

220.1--dc23

2013005310

This book is gratefully dedicated to all the students of  
Westminster Theological Seminary past, present, and future.





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# Acknowledgments

*THY WORD IS STILL TRUTH* is a work that has come into being through the life and ministry of Westminster Theological Seminary. The title itself reminds us of the important impact of early faculty member E. J. Young, whose classic book on inerrancy was entitled *Thy Word Is Truth*. This anthology unapologetically borrows that title, emphasizing Westminster's abiding commitment to the entire truthfulness of the Holy Scriptures. Also with these pages, we recognize that our theological tradition is profoundly indebted to Reformed thinkers of bygone ages, as well as to the faculty members of Westminster Theological Seminary from its beginning to the present. So we gratefully acknowledge our dependence on all who have gone before.

We thank our families and the faculty, administration, and board of the seminary for their encouragement and support in many ways. We wish to say our special thanks to those who lent so much gracious help to enable this work to appear. In particular, we express our deep appreciation for the excellent labors of Dr. Bernard Aubert, who did much of the careful research for our bibliographies, our notes, and the accuracy of the selected passages. We also wish to thank the administrative support in the President's Office. We are especially grateful to Melinda Dugan, Patti Scherphorn, and Abbie Daise for their time and organized assistance in the production of our work. We also thank Westminster's library staff for their help. We wish to thank seminary counsel Jim Sweet for his numerous letters to secure permissions, and we also thank all those\* who have granted them.

We thank our friends at P&R Publishing for their long and faithful partnership in this work as well as so many other projects, and we especially acknowledge Marvin Padgett, Bryce Craig, John J. Hughes, and Karen Magnuson for their guidance, suggestions, and editorial support.

Finally, we thank all of those too numerous to mention who have played other important roles in helping this multiyear and substantial project to become a reality.

With grateful hearts and sincere prayers we ask that God would bless this work for the strengthening of his church and the deepening of our commitments to the great

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ in John 17:17, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (John 17:17 KJV). SOLI DEO GLORIA!

Your Brothers in Christ’s Service,

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# Introduction

We believe that these Holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God, and that whatsoever man ought to believe unto salvation, is sufficiently taught therein. For since the whole manner of worship which God requires of us is written in them at large, it is unlawful for any one, though an Apostle, to teach otherwise than we are now taught in the Holy Scriptures: *nay, though it were an angel from heaven*, as the Apostle Paul saith (Gal. 1:8–9). For since it is forbidden to *add unto or take away any thing from the Word of God* (Deut. 12:32; Prov. 30:6; Rev. 22:18; John 4:25), it doth thereby evidently appear that the doctrine thereof is most perfect and complete in all respects. Neither may we compare any writings of men, though ever so holy, with those divine Scriptures; nor ought we to compare custom, or the great multitude, or antiquity, or succession of times or persons, or councils, decrees, or statutes, with the truth of God, for the truth is above all: for all men are of themselves liars, and more vain than vanity itself. Therefore we reject with all our hearts whatsoever doth not agree with this infallible rule, which the Apostles have taught us, saying, *Try the spirits whether they are of God* (1 John 4:1); likewise, *If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house* (2 John 10). (Belgic Confession 7)

As light that passes through the colored glass of a cathedral window, we are told, is light from heaven, but is stained by the tints of the glass through which it passes; so any word of God which is passed through the mind and soul of a man must come out discolored by the personality through which it is given, and just to that degree ceases to be the pure word of God. But what if this personality has itself been formed by God into precisely the personality it is, for the express purpose of communicating to the word given through it just the coloring which it gives it? What if the colors of the stained-glass window have been designed by the architect for the express purpose of giving to the light that floods the cathedral precisely the tone and quality it receives from them? What if the word of God that comes to His people is framed by God into the word of God it is, precisely by means of the qualities of the men formed by Him for the purpose, through which it is given? When we think of God the Lord giving by His Spirit a body of authoritative Scriptures to His people, we must remember that He is the God of providence and of grace as well as of revelation and inspiration, and that He holds all the lines of preparation as fully under His direction as He does the specific operation which we call technically, in the narrow sense, by the name of “inspiration.” (Warfield)

One of the hallmarks of Westminster Theological Seminary from its beginning in 1929 under the courageous leadership of Dr. J. Gresham Machen has been a high view of Scripture reflecting the historic Reformed theological and confessional tradition:

When we say that the Bible is the Word of God, we mean something very definite indeed. We mean that the Bible is true. We mean that the writers of the Bible, in addition to all their providential qualifications for their task, received an immediate and supernatural guidance and impulsion of the Spirit of God which kept them from the errors that are found in other books, and made the resulting book, the Bible, to be completely true in what it says regarding matters of fact, and completely authoritative in its commands. That is the great doctrine of the full or plenary inspiration of Holy Scripture. (Machen)

In recent years, this understanding of God's Word has been repeatedly challenged—not simply by those in the liberal Protestant tradition, but also by those in the broad evangelical perspective. In fact, in the past few years, Westminster addressed related issues in its own theological crisis, which was motivated by differing hermeneutical perspectives and broader understandings of confessional boundaries. Resolving the conflict required an extensive and often painful process of theological clarification, historical reappraisal, and financial risks, because the debate impacted friends of the seminary who took varying perspectives on the issues involved.

Having resolved this conflict and having begun to articulate once again a clear and historic witness to this core value, Westminster now gives to the world a theological testimony of the integrity of our views that we believe are grounded in the long and august Reformed tradition on the doctrine of Scripture.

In this context, *Thy Word Is Still Truth* offers a selection of texts on the doctrine of Scripture. The purpose of this book is to demonstrate that the conclusions reached in this controversy, whose focal point was at Westminster, are nothing less than the continuing flowering of the reformational views of Luther, Calvin, Bullinger, and the Reformed confessions on the doctrine of Scripture. Building on this foundation, the ongoing reflection and contributions of theologians from various traditions and confessions of the Reformed faith, we believe, led us ultimately to the Westminster Confession of Faith's conclusion as confirmed by this debate at Westminster Seminary.

The union of the many voices included in this volume that come together to support this conclusion is what makes the argument compelling. The selections included build a sweeping and elegant case for the conclusion that Westminster Seminary reached in this controversy. The climax of the debate was reached in a document entitled "Affirmations and Denials Regarding Recent Issues," which is one of the final pieces in this theological anthology:

The Board wishes to reassure our constituencies and to assert to the watching world that it is still the core commitment of Westminster Theological Seminary to prepare pastors, leaders and scholars for the Church and the Kingdom of Christ. Such specialists in the Bible are discerning believers in Scripture who do not shirk the difficult questions, but who also address such questions from the vantage point of Westminster's historic heartfelt (ex animo) vow to the infallible Word of God. (Statement from the Board of Trustees, Westminster Theological Seminary [September 24, 2008])

Today, like Pilate at Jesus' trial, our world and even the church are confused about ultimate issues. Pilate's question to Jesus, "What is truth?" (John 18:38), is still as urgent today as it was back then. Earlier, in the High Priestly Prayer, Jesus had affirmed, "Thy word is truth" (John 17:17 KJV). When Edward J. Young looked for a title to his manifesto on the doctrine

of inspiration, he turned to these words of Jesus. Jesus himself attested to the truth of God's Word; Young skillfully defended the truth of the Word. Today, we want to confess again in the presence of God, *Thy Word Is Still Truth*.

That Word above all earthly pow'rs,  
No thanks to them, abideth;  
The Spirit and the gifts are ours,  
Through him who with us sideth.  
Let goods and kindred go,  
This mortal life also;  
The body they may kill;  
God's truth abideth still;  
His kingdom is forever.  
(Martin Luther, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God")

The Scriptures are perfect, inasmuch as they were uttered by the Word of God and His Spirit, though we want the knowledge of their mysteries. (Irenaeus)

Therefore all Scripture is God-breathed, and in every way profitable so that one may best and most profitably to the soul search the Divine Scriptures. (John of Damascus)

Westminster Theological Seminary, in its commitment to the authority, sufficiency, self-attestation, and inerrant authority of Scripture, stands in continuity with the church universal and more specifically in line with the rediscovery and expansion of biblical authority in the Reformed traditions. This anthology presents chronologically and thematically major witnesses to this rich and varied understanding of God's Word. Two main strands of influence are clearly at work in the Westminster school: on the one hand, the Scots-Irish Presbyterian brand represented (e.g., John Murray); on the other, the Dutch heritage (e.g., Cornelius Van Til). The confessional sources of these two currents are the Westminster Standards and the Three Forms of Unity, respectively, which in turn are indebted to the Reformation in general and to Calvin in particular. Westminster Seminary's clear stance on Scripture is defined not in a vacuum, but with a great awareness of the difficult questions raised by the scholarship of its time. Indeed, Westminster, in the line of Old Princeton, has a long-standing tradition of interacting with the newest scholarship. This commitment is well illustrated by the training of several of its professors on European soil.

This anthology strives to document the diverse streams of influence that have shaped Westminster's strong commitment to Scripture, demonstrating not only how various themes have developed through the centuries, but also how the doctrine of Scripture was often shaped in the challenging furnaces of controversy. Our journey begins with the breakthrough of the Reformation in the sixteenth century. At the outset, several fronts were opened. On one side, Luther challenged the humanism of Erasmus by proclaiming the clarity of the Word even in thorny subjects such as the question of free will. On the other side, Zwingli, in debating Catholic traditions, unabashedly asserted the sole authority of Scripture in deciding controversial matters, thus making giant strides in defining the doctrine of *sola Scriptura*:

His will and true service we can learn and discover only from His true word in the Holy Scriptures and in the trustworthy writings of His twelve apostles, otherwise from no human laws and statutes. (Zwingli)

With Bullinger and Calvin, the doctrine of Scripture is further refined and defined. In particular, Calvin expounds the necessity of the Bible and the self-authenticating character of the Word of God in relation to the Holy Spirit:

Let this point therefore stand: that those whom the Holy Spirit has inwardly taught truly rest upon Scripture, and that Scripture indeed is self-authenticated; hence, it is not right to subject it to proof and reasoning. And the certainty it deserves with us, it attains by the testimony of the Spirit. (Calvin)

The pages that follow continue with a survey of what Reformed confessions profess about God's Word. From the morning light of the dawn of the Reformation to the more mature statements of such documents as Bullinger's Second Helvetic Confession and the Westminster Standards, we encounter a unified witness to the divine authority of Scripture shining throughout Europe. These documents express in succinct terms the authoritative teaching of the churches stemming out of the Reformation. By turning next to examples of biblical interpretation at the time of the Reformation, the anthology sheds light on another facet of the Reformed understanding of Scripture. Both Bullinger's *De Testamento* and Calvin's *Christ the End of the Law* were first published separately, and both were later inserted into larger volumes: Bullinger's text as an appendix to his commentary on the New Testament Epistles and Calvin's work as an introduction to the New Testament. Thus both works are essential representations of the Reformers' hermeneutics. The following selections in this section depict how Reformed interpretation unfolded in England, Scotland, and America.

In the next section, this book turns to the doctrine of Scripture at the time of Reformed orthodoxy. In the context of the more complex discussions of scholasticism and of the rise of rationalism, Reformed theologians took upon themselves the responsibility to defend the authority of Scripture. This anthology presents not only samples from the important Puritan theologians William Ames and John Owen, but also texts from Continental Europe by Francis Turretin and the Helvetic Consensus Formula, as well as Jonathan Edwards's defense of Scripture in light of rationalism. These theological writings have had a significant impact on Old Princeton and in turn the Westminster tradition.

The next three sections offer more proximate contexts for the affirmation of Scripture at Westminster.

First, as indicated above, the Scottish and Dutch legacies correspond to two main strands of theology at Westminster Seminary. The Scottish legacy itself is strongly influenced by the high view of Scripture presented in the Westminster Standards. The Dutch legacy is seen here from two angles: directly from Europe with Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck and indirectly in the work of Louis Berkhof. Indeed, Berkhof was an important transmitter of Dutch theology in America.

Second, our window into the European contribution enables us to grasp early Reformed responses to the earlier rationalist attack on Scripture that is also characteristic of our time. The Swiss theologian Louis Gaussen offers a confessional stand on Scripture. Both

Adolphe Monod and Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg rejected their rationalist past to embrace a Reformed orthodox position on the Bible. A representative piece from Charles H. Spurgeon is also included.

Third, Old Princeton, the parent institution of Westminster, provides a natural background for better understanding Westminster's stance. This collection includes three representative theologians of Old Princeton: Charles Hodge, his natural child Archibald Alexander Hodge, and his spiritual heir B. B. Warfield. The father laid the groundwork, the son was known as an excellent communicator of the Princeton tradition, and Warfield brilliantly furthered the Princeton doctrine of Scripture. Moisés Silva's fine article offers a fitting summary and conclusion to this section.

Westminster was founded in the midst of raging controversies in the 1920s. The heart of the matter was the gulf between true supernatural Christianity and a watered-down, naturalistic version of Christianity. In this context, defending the supernatural character of Scripture was paramount. This defense was most clearly expressed by some of the founders of Westminster, specifically J. Gresham Machen, Robert Dick Wilson, and John Murray. Here Machen's address is most likely his last words on this issue; Wilson, the great Old Testament scholar, defends the Bible against the onslaught of modern scholarship; and Murray formulates the doctrine of Scripture in a characteristically precise and clear manner.

The doctrines of Scripture and of its interpretation were developed in different ways at Westminster as various challenges were being faced. In the footsteps of the pioneer efforts of Geerhardus Vos, Westminster advanced the discipline of biblical theology in a confessional framework:

The line of revelation is like the stem of those trees that grow in rings. Each successive ring has grown out of the preceding one. But out of the sap and vigor that is in this stem there springs a crown with branches and leaves and flowers and fruit. Such is the true relation between Biblical and Systematic Theology. Dogmatics is the crown which grows out of all the work that Biblical Theology can accomplish. (Vos)

After presenting key texts by Vos himself, the collection shows how Ned B. Stonehouse applied this approach to his field of Gospel studies and how Edmund P. Clowney brought biblical theology with its Christological focus to the pulpit. The next three excerpts illustrate how a Reformed biblical-theological approach relates to specific concerns. Vern S. Poythress illustrates how a high view of inspiration harmoniously fits the endeavors of the human authors of Scripture. Moisés Silva, for his part, places the study of the Bible at Westminster squarely on the shoulders of Christian interpreters of all ages by considering central concerns in the history of interpretation.

In clearly expressed passages of scripture one can find all the things that concern faith and the moral life (namely hope and love . . .). Then, after gaining familiarity with the language of the divine scriptures, one should proceed to explore and analyse the obscure passages, by taking examples from the more obvious parts to illuminate obscure expressions and by using the evidence of indisputable passages to remove the uncertainty of ambiguous ones.<sup>1</sup>

1. St. Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, trans. R. P. H. Green (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 37.

Finally, Richard B. Gaffin Jr. examines how debates about hermeneutics raging in philosophical circles and among theologians relate to the interpretation of the New Testament.

One of the crucial questions of modern theological studies is that of the canon of Scripture. Westminster did not fail to address the problem as it relates to the inspiration, nature, and authority of the Bible. Early on in the life of the seminary, both Young and Stonehouse addressed the question from their respective fields of expertise. Later on, Gaffin revisited the question: while standing in continuation with Calvin and the Westminster Confession of Faith, he advances the debate by integrating the insights of a redemptive-historical approach. Besides the question of the canon, other challenges to the doctrine of Scripture arose; the articles in the next section respond to some of these.

A consideration of the history of the doctrine of Scripture in the Reformed tradition in general and during the life span of Westminster has brought to light two important aspects. On the one hand, the Reformed tradition has not failed to tackle the hard questions and to engage competing views, whether they be the traditionalism of Catholicism, the humanism of the Renaissance, or the rising of rationalism from the time of scholasticism to the emergence of modern theology and critical scholarship.

The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it may be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly. (WCF 1.9)

On the other hand, the Reformed faith also expressed a clear clarion sound in defense of the Scripture and its inspiration, authority, and inerrancy. May this anthology spur us forward in faithfulness to both Scripture and our calling to engage current issues. The texts of Sinclair B. Ferguson and Young assist us in defining and clarifying a biblical understanding of the inspiration of Scripture. Ferguson argues that not the shape of Scripture, but rather what Scripture asserts about itself, has priority in defining our doctrine of Scripture. Young's classic addresses thorny topics such as the comprehensive nature of inspiration and the role of human authorship. John M. Frame's two essays help us to refine our understanding of the self-witness of Scripture and assist us in responding to the philosophical and theological challenge that human language is inadequate to transmit revelation from God. While Raymond Dillard and Bruce Waltke address current issues in Old Testament studies, Peter Lillback presents controversies by relating our current hermeneutical crisis to the confessional standards of Westminster Seminary.

As our anthology comes to a close, we are now better equipped to observe how the conclusions reached during this time of crisis at Westminster build on the insights of previous generations. The section on the Westminster controversy presents two succinct documents summarizing the outcome of the theological reflection on Scripture that has taken place over these past few years. Finally, the anthology closes with Lillback's introduction to Gaffin's classic study on the doctrine of Scripture of Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck and with Gaffin's concluding remarks to the same study.

In conclusion, a consideration of these many voices reveals that the Reformed faith is a living tradition engaging with the pressing questions of the day. While a careful reading of these texts unveils a certain diversity of views, there remains among all these theologians a broad consensus about the authority and inspiration of Scripture:



The hermeneutical flexibility that has characterized our tradition would probably come as a surprise to many observers who view Westminster as excessively rigid. Ironically, our confessional documents, the Westminster Confession and Catechisms, are far more extensive and detailed than those found in most evangelical institutions. Our theological parameters are indeed very clearly defined, and yet those parameters themselves have made possible a diversity of viewpoints that would not have been tolerated in some other institutions. (Silva)

This high view of Scripture is based on the testimony of Scripture itself about its nature. Thus, this foundation is sure and enables the church to rest secure as she faces the storms of controversy:

How firm a foundation, you saints of the Lord,  
is laid for your faith in his excellent Word!  
What more can he say than to you he has said,  
to you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?  
("How Firm a Foundation")

Our prayer is that God, by his grace, would use this anthology to further his kingdom. We hope this book will help our readers to discern that Westminster's theological position rightfully stands on the shoulders of many theological giants who have preceded it and prepared the way for its birth and development.

Son, all the books of Scripture, both Old Testament and New, are inspired by God and useful for instruction, as the Apostle says; but to those who really study it the Psalter yields especial treasure. Briefly, then, if indeed any more is needed to drive home the point, the whole divine Scripture is the teacher of virtue and true faith, but the Psalter gives a picture of spiritual life. And so you too, Marcellinus, pondering the Psalms and reading them intelligently, with the Spirit as your guide, will be able to grasp the meaning of each one, even as you desire. (Athanasius to Marcellinus)<sup>2</sup>

We must not suppose that the language proceeds from the men who are inspired, but from the Divine Word which moves them. (Justin Martyr)

We cannot say of the writings of the Holy Spirit that anything in them is useless or superfluous, even if they seem to some obscure. (Origen)

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Professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology, Emeritus,  
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2. St. Athanasius, "The Letter of St. Athanasius to Marcellinus on the Interpretation of the Psalms," in *On the Incarnation* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 2003), 97, 107, 119.





# Abbreviations

ACW	Ancient Christian Writers. New York: Newman, 1946–.
ANF	Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds. Ante-Nicene Fathers. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951–.
BDE	Timothy Larsen, ed. <i>Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals</i> . Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003.
Beeke & Ferguson. <i>Reformed Confessions</i>	Joel R. Beeke and Sinclair B. Ferguson, eds. <i>Reformed Confessions Harmonized</i> . Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999.
<i>Bible Interpreters of the 20th Century</i>	Walter A. Elwell and J. D. Weaver, eds. <i>Bible Interpreters of the 20th Century: A Selection of Evangelical Voices</i> . Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999.
BT	I. Epstein, ed. <i>The Babylonian Talmud</i> . London: Soncino Press, 1935–52.
<i>The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology</i>	David Bagchi and David C. Steinmetz, eds. <i>The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology</i> . New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
CCL	<i>Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina</i> . Turnhout: Brepols, 1953–.
CO	<i>Calvin opera quae supersunt omnia</i> . 1863–1900.
Cochrane. <i>Reformed Confessions</i>	Arthur C. Cochrane. <i>Reformed Confessions of the 16th Century</i> . Rev. ed. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1966, 2003.
CR	<i>Corpus Reformatorum</i> . Berlin: C. A. Schwetschke, 1834–.
CSEL	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i> . Vienna: Tempsky, 1865–.
CTJ	<i>Calvin Theological Journal</i> .
Dennison. <i>Reformed Confessions</i>	James T. Dennison Jr. <i>Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation</i> . Vol. 1, 1523–1552. Vol. 2, 1552–1566. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008, 2010.
DHT	Trevor A. Hart, ed. <i>The Dictionary of Historical Theology</i> . Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000.

# ABBREVIATIONS

DMBI (2007)	Donald McKim, ed. <i>Dictionary of Major Biblical Interpreters</i> . Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007.
DP&RTA	D. G. Hart and Mark A. Noll, eds. <i>Dictionary of the Presbyterian &amp; Reformed Tradition in America</i> . Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999.
DSCH&T	Nigel M. de S. Cameron, ed. <i>Dictionary of Scottish Church History &amp; Theology</i> . Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993.
EDT	Walter A. Elwell, ed. <i>Evangelical Dictionary of Theology</i> . Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984.
FC	Father of the Church. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press.
Hall. <i>Harmony</i>	Peter Hall, ed. <i>The Harmony of Protestant Confessions: Exhibiting the Faith of the Churches of Christ Reformed after the Pure and Holy Doctrine of the Gospel, throughout Europe</i> . London: John F. Shaw, 1844.
<i>Inerrancy and Hermeneutic</i>	Harvie M. Conn, ed. <i>Inerrancy and Hermeneutic: A Tradition, A Challenge, A Debate</i> . Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988.
<i>Inerrancy and the Church</i>	John D. Hannah, ed. <i>Inerrancy and the Church</i> . Chicago: Moody, 1984.
<i>The Devoted Life</i>	Kelly M. Kapic and Randall C. Gleason, eds. <i>The Devoted Life: An Invitation to the Puritan Classics</i> . Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004.
LCC	John Baillie, John T. McNeill, and Henry P. Van Dusen, eds. <i>Library of Christian Classics</i> . Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953–66.
Leith. <i>Creeds of the Churches</i>	John H. Leith, ed. <i>Creeds of the Churches: A Reader in Christian Doctrine from the Bible to the Present</i> . Rev. ed. Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1963, 1973.
LF	A Library of the Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church. Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1838–81.
Loeb	The Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
NDT	Sinclair B. Ferguson and David F. Wright, eds. <i>New Dictionary of Theology</i> . Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988.
NIDCC	J. D. Douglas, ed. <i>The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church</i> . Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978.
NPNF1	Philip Schaff, ed. <i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series</i> . Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956.
NPNF2	Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds. <i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series</i> . Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952.

# ABBREVIATIONS

NSHERK	<i>The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge</i> . Vols. 1–15. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977.
PG	Jacques-Paul Migne, ed. <i>Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca</i> . Paris: J.-P. Migne, 1857–66.
PL	Jacques-Paul Migne, ed. <i>Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Latina</i> . Paris: Garnieri Fratres, 1844–64.
PRE <sup>1</sup>	<i>Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche</i> . Edited by J. J. Herzog. 1st ed. 22 vols. Hamburg: R. Besser, 1854–68.
PRE <sup>2</sup>	<i>Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche</i> . Edited by J. J. Herzog and G. L. Plitt. 2nd rev. ed. 18 vols. Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1877–88.
PRE <sup>3</sup>	<i>Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche</i> . Edited by Albert Hauck. 3rd rev. ed. 24 vols. Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1896–1913.
<i>Reformed Theology in America</i>	David F. Wells, ed. <i>Reformed Theology in America: A History of Its Modern Development</i> . Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985.
Reid, ed. <i>John Calvin: His Influence in the Western World</i> .	W. Stanford Reid, ed. <i>John Calvin: His Influence in the Western World</i> . Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982.
Schaff. <i>The Creeds of Christendom</i>	<i>The Creeds of Christendom</i> . Edited by Philip Schaff. Revised by David S. Schaff. 3 vols. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1931, 1983.
Schroeder. <i>Council of Trent</i>	H. J. Schroeder, ed. <i>Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent</i> . St. Louis: Herder, 1941.
<i>Scripture and Truth</i>	D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, eds. <i>Scripture and Truth</i> . Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992.
Str-B	H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck. <i>Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch</i> . 6 vols. Munich, 1922–61.
VD	Robert Bellarmine, “De Controversiis: Prima Controversia Generalis—De Verbo Dei.” In <i>Opera Omnia</i> . Vol. 1. Neapoli: Josephum Giluiano, 1856.
WCF	Westminster Confession of Faith.
Werke WA	<i>Martin Luthers Werke</i> . Kritische Gesamtausgabe. Weimar.
WTJ	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i> .



# Notes on the Introductions and Bibliographies

EACH SELECTION IS INTRODUCED by a short note that places the texts in their historical contexts and summarizes the main contributions of the documents. These introductions are followed by short bibliographies. These are meant to be suggestions for the readers who want to learn more; they are in no way comprehensive. A special place is given in these bibliographical notes to works written within the Princeton/Westminster tradition.





## *SOLA SCRIPTURA:* THE REFORMERS' REDISCOVERY OF THE WRITTEN WORD OF GOD

THE DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE defended at Westminster Theological Seminary has its roots in the Protestant Reformation of sixteenth-century Europe. The first part of this compendium reflects this period of crucial rediscovery of the authority of Scripture, the written Word of God, by presenting four key figures of the Reformation: Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, Heinrich Bullinger, and John Calvin. Westminster Calvinism naturally appeals to the legacy of Calvin, and the Reformed faith also builds on a broader foundation. In many respects, the views of Calvin stand in continuity with those of Luther. Moreover, as it is commonly held, the Reformed tradition is not monolithic, stemming from only one source. Our anthology emphasizes this historical reality by integrating Zwingli, the founder of the Reformation in Zurich, and Bullinger, his successor.

The selections of texts show in addition that the Reformers defined their doctrine of Scripture in contrast to several opposing forces. All four writers had, of course, to assert the authority of Scripture alone over against that of the Catholic Church and her traditions. The text from Luther's *Bondage of the Will* depicts that he was also battling the humanism of Erasmus. In the context of the controversy over free will, he affirmed the clarity or perspicuity of Scripture. In other words, the Bible speaks clearly and authoritatively even on such thorny topics as free will and predestination. This angle on Scripture will be found later on in the Reformed tradition, especially in the struggle of the Synod of Dort and the Westminster Standards against Arminianism. In the first Zurich Disputation (1523), Zwingli responds to his Catholic critics. His reformation of practices in the church was based on his reading of Scripture, and thus he defends his work on the basis of the principle of *sola Scriptura*. This account reveals how, according to Zwingli and his colleagues, several traditional practices of the Catholic Church do not stand the test of Scripture. With his popular sermons, entitled *The Decades*, Bullinger strengthened not only the Reformation in Zurich, but also the one in England. Indeed, those were translated early on and spread widely. In the two sermons selected, he develops the doctrine of Scripture in contrast to Catholicism and to the early Anabaptists. Indeed, not only does Scripture teach salvation by faith alone, but also the

message of the Bible unfolds progressively in its pages. The second sermon conveys that the Bible is to be heard and obeyed, thus leading to godliness. Selections by Bullinger are also found in the second part, where he conveys his view on Scripture and interpretation in the Second Helvetic Confession, and in the third part, where his treatise on the covenant is reproduced. Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559) is the classic formulation of sixteenth-century Reformed theology. There the doctrine of Scripture is set in the context of God's general and special revelation. Calvin's first chapter here develops the necessity of Scripture for a right, saving knowledge of God. The second chapter develops the witness of the Spirit as the ultimate source of the authority of Scripture. This view contrasts with that of the Catholic Church, which sees the church as lending authority to the Bible.

While the four selections in this part present the doctrine of Scripture defended by the Reformers, the next part will consider the official statements of the Reformation of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In addition, the third part will turn from the definition of the doctrine of Scripture to the implications of this doctrine for the interpretation of the Bible.





# The Bondage of the Will

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MARTIN LUTHER

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Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, trans. Henry Cole with slight alteration from Edward Thomas Vaughan, corrected by Henry Atherton (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931), 18–29.

Martin Luther (1483–1546), the founder of Protestantism, was born in Eisleben, Germany, was educated at the University of Erfurt, and entered in 1505 the Augustinian monastery at Erfurt. He was a professor of the Bible at the University of Wittenberg and through his studies resolved his spiritual crisis by rediscovering the doctrine of justification by faith alone. It led him to reject the abuses of the Roman Catholic Church and to understand that “the righteous shall live by faith.” The posting of his Ninety-five Theses at Wittenberg on October 31, 1517 marks the beginning of the Reformation. Further, he set forth the Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura* in his famous 1519 debate with John Eck at Leipzig. Luther’s works fill up entire shelves; thus we can mention only a fraction of his writings. In 1520, he wrote several major reformational works, such as *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church* and *The Freedom of a Christian Man*. He also wrote many biblical commentaries, for instance on Genesis, the Psalms, Romans, and Galatians. Though Luther clashed with Zwingli over the interpretation of the Lord’s Supper, Luther’s breakthrough impacted all branches of Protestantism; in particular, John Calvin was greatly indebted to his thought. Luther distanced himself not only from the Catholic Church, but also from Erasmus’s humanism. While he could welcome Erasmus’s scholarship, he challenged his doctrine of man. Our selection highlights this controversy with humanism.

In this selection taken from *The Bondage of the Will*, Luther debates with Erasmus over free will, and we see that his doctrine of Scripture alone is intimately coupled with the perspicuity of Scripture, or the clarity of God’s Word in its central teachings. That Scripture speaks clearly even to such questions as free will and predestination was crucial to Luther, and after him to Calvin and the Synod of Dort.

Bibliography: J. Atkinson. "Luther, Martin (1483–1546)." Pp. 401–4 in *NDT*. Roland H. Bainton. *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther*. Peabody, MA: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1950. Martin Brecht. *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation*. 3 vols. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985–93. T. George. "Luther, Martin (1493–1546)." Pp. 375–79 in *BDE*. R. W. Heinze. "Luther, Martin (1483–1546)." Pp. 665–67 in *EDT*. Scott Hendrix. "5. Luther." Pp. 39–56 in *The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology*. Bernhard Lohse. *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*. Ed. and trans. Roy A. Harrisville. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999. "Luther, Martin." *NSHERK* 7:69–79. Martin Luther. *The Bondage of the Will*. Trans. J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston. Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1996. Carl S. Meyer. "Luther, Martin (1483–1546)." Pp. 609–11 in *NIDCC*. Robert D. Preus. "Luther and Biblical Infallibility." Pp. 99–142 in *Inerrancy and the Church*. David S. Yeago. "Luther, Martin (1483–1546)." Pp. 331–35 in *DHT*.



## Erasmus's Preface Reviewed

Section I.—FIRST of all, I would just touch upon some of the heads of your PREFACE; in which, you somewhat disparage our cause and adorn your own. In the first place, I would notice your censuring in me, in all your former books, an obstinacy of assertion; and saying, in this book, "that you are so far from delighting in assertions, that you would rather at once go over to the sentiments of the sceptics, if the inviolable authority of the Holy Scriptures, and the decrees of the church, would permit you: to which authorities you willingly submit yourself in all things, whether you follow what they prescribe, or follow it not." These are the principles that please you.

I consider (as in courtesy bound) that these things are asserted by you from a benevolent mind, as being a lover of peace. But if any one else had asserted them, I should, perhaps, have attacked him in my accustomed manner. But, however, I must not even allow you, though so very good in your intentions, to err in this opinion. For not to delight in assertions, is not the character of the Christian mind: nay, he must delight in assertions, or he is not a Christian. But, that we may not be mistaken in terms, by *assertion*, I mean a constant adhering, affirming, confessing, defending, and invincibly persevering. Nor do I believe the term signifies any thing else, either among the Latins [or classical authors], or as it is used by us at this day.

And moreover, I speak concerning the asserting of those things, which are delivered to us from above in the Holy Scriptures. Were it not so, we should want neither Erasmus nor any other instructor to teach us, that, in things doubtful, useless, or unnecessary; assertions, contentions, and strivings, would be not only absurd, but impious; and Paul condemns such in more places than one. Nor do you, I believe, speak of these things, unless, as a ridiculous orator, you wish to take up one subject, and go on with another, as the Roman Emperor did with his Turbot; or, with the madness of a wicked writer, you wish to contend, that the article concerning "Free-will" is doubtful, or not necessary.

Be sceptics and academics far from us Christians; but be there with us assertors twofold more determined than the stoics themselves. How often does the apostle Paul require that assurance of faith; that is, that most certain, and most firm assertion of Conscience, calling it (Rom. 10:10) confession, "With the mouth confession is made unto salvation?" And Christ

also saith, “Whosoever confesseth Me before men, him will I confess before My Father” (Matt. 10:32). Peter commands us to “give a reason of the hope” that is in us (1 Peter 3:15). But why should I dwell upon this; nothing is more known and more general among Christians than assertions. Take away assertions, and you take away Christianity. Nay, the Holy Spirit is given unto them from heaven, that He may glorify Christ, and confess Him even unto death; unless this be not to assert—to die for confession and assertion. In a word, the Spirit so asserts, that He comes upon the whole world and reproves them of sin (John 16:8); thus, as it were, provoking to battle. And Paul enjoins Timothy to reprove, and to be instant out of season (2 Tim. 4:2). But how ludicrous to me would be that reprover, who should neither really believe that himself, of which he reproved, nor constantly assert it! Why I would send him to Anticyra, to be cured.<sup>1</sup>

But I am the greatest fool, who thus lose words and time upon that, which is clearer than the sun. What Christian would bear that assertions should be contemned? This would be at once to deny all piety and religion together; or to assert, that religion, piety, and every doctrine, is nothing at all. Why therefore do you too say, that you do not delight in assertions, and that you prefer such a mind to any other?

But you would have it understood that you have said nothing here concerning confessing Christ, and His doctrines. I receive the admonition. And, in courtesy to you, I give up my right and custom, and refrain from judging of your heart, reserving that for another time, or for others. In the mean time, I admonish you to correct your tongue, and your pen, and to refrain henceforth from using such expressions. For, how upright and honest soever your heart may be, your words, which are the index of the heart, are not so. For, if you think the matter of “Free-will” is not necessary to be known, nor at all concerned with Christ, you speak honestly, but think wickedly: but, if you think it is necessary, you speak wickedly, and think rightly. And if so, then there is no room for you to complain and exaggerate so much concerning useless assertions and contentions: for what have they to do with the nature of the cause?

## **Erasmus’s Scepticism**

Section II.—BUT what will you say to these your declarations, when, be it remembered, they are not confined to “Free-will” only, but apply to all doctrines in general throughout the world—that, “if it were permitted you, by the inviolable authority of the sacred Writings and decrees of the church, you would go over to the sentiments of the Sceptics?”—

What an all-changeable Proteus<sup>2</sup> is there in these expressions, “inviolable authority” and “decrees of the church!” As though you could have so very great a reverence for the Scriptures and the church, when at the same time you signify, that you wish you had the liberty of being a Sceptic! What Christian would talk in this way? But if you say this in reference to useless and doubtful doctrines, what news is there in what you say? Who, in such things, would not wish for the liberty of the sceptical profession? Nay, what Christian is there who does not actually use this liberty freely, and condemn all those who are drawn away with, and captivated by every opinion? Unless you consider all Christians to be such (as the term

1. Ed. Note: Anticyra was a Greek port “known for hellebore (a medicinal plant)”; cf.  *OCD 104 [Oxford Classical Dictionary, ed. S. Hornblower and A. Spawforth; 3rd ed. (Oxford, 1996)]*.

2. Ed. Note: Proteus is “a minor sea-god” who “takes on various shapes . . . to escape”; cf.  *OCD 1265*.

is generally understood) whose doctrines are useless, and for which they quarrel like fools, and contend by assertions. But if you speak of necessary things, what declaration more impious can any one make, than that he wishes for the liberty of asserting nothing in such matters? Whereas, the Christian will rather say this—I am so averse to the sentiments of the Sceptics, that wherever I am not hindered by the infirmity of the flesh, I will not only steadily adhere to the Sacred Writings every where, and in all parts of them, and assert them, but I wish also to be as certain as possible in things that are not necessary, and that lie without the Scripture: for what is more miserable than uncertainty.

What shall we say to these things also, where you add, “To which authorities I submit my opinion in all things; whether I follow what they enjoin, or follow it not.”

What say you, Erasmus? Is it not enough that you submit your opinion to the Scriptures? Do you submit it to the decrees of the church also? What can the church decree, that is not decreed in the Scriptures? If it can, where then remains the liberty and power of judging those who make the decrees? As Paul teaches, “Let others judge” (1 Cor. 14:29). Are you not pleased that there should be any one to judge the decrees of the church, which, nevertheless, Paul enjoins? What new kind of religion and humility is this, that, by our own example, you would take away from us the power of judging the decrees of men, and give it unto men without judgment? Where does the Scripture of God command us to do this?

Moreover, what Christian would so commit the injunctions of the Scripture and of the church to the winds, as to say “whether I follow them, or follow them not?” You submit yourself, and yet care not at all whether you follow them or not. But let that Christian be anathema, who is not certain in, and does not follow, that which is enjoined him. For how will he believe that which he does not follow? Do you here, then, mean to say, that following is understanding a thing certainly, and not doubting of it at all in a sceptical manner? If you do, what is there in any creature which any one can follow, if following be understanding, and seeing and knowing perfectly? And if this be the case, then it is impossible that any one should, at the same time, follow some things, and not follow others: whereas, by following one certain thing, God, he follows all things; that is, in Him, whom whoso followeth not, never followeth any part of His creature.

In a word, these declarations of yours amount to this: that, with you, it matters not what is believed by any one, any where, if the peace of the world be but undisturbed; and if every one be but allowed, when his life, his reputation, or his interest is at stake, to do as he did, who said, “If they affirm, I affirm, if they deny, I deny” [Terence, *Eunuchus*, 2.252 (Loeb, 1.339)]: and to look upon the Christian doctrines as nothing better than the opinions of philosophers and men: and that it is the greatest of folly to quarrel about, contend for, and assert them, as nothing can arise therefrom but contention, and the disturbance of the public peace: “that what is above us, does not concern us.” This, I say, is what your declarations amount to.—Thus, to put an end to our fightings, you come in as an intermediate peace-maker, that you may cause each side to suspend arms, and persuade us to cease from drawing swords about things so absurd and useless.

What I should cut at here, I believe, my friend Erasmus, you know very well. But, as I said before, I will not openly express myself. In the mean time, I excuse your very good intention of heart; but do you go no further; fear the Spirit of God, who searcheth the reins and the heart, and who is not deceived by artfully contrived expressions. I have, upon this occasion, expressed myself thus, that henceforth you may cease to accuse our cause of pertinacity or

obstinacy. For, by so doing, you only evince that you hug in your heart a Lucian, or some other of the swinish tribe of the Epicureans; who, because he does not believe there is a God himself, secretly laughs at all those who do believe and confess it. Allow *us* to be assertors, and to study and delight in assertions: and do you favour your Sceptics and Academics until Christ shall have called you also. The Holy Spirit is not a Sceptic, nor are what He has written on our hearts doubts or opinions, but assertions more certain, and more firm, than life itself and all human experience.

[Of the perspicuity (clearness) of Scripture]

Section III.—Now I come to the next head, which is connected with this; where you make a “distinction between the Christian doctrines,” and pretend that “some are necessary, and some not necessary.” You say, that “some are abstruse, and some quite clear.” Thus you merely sport the sayings of others, or else exercise yourself, as it were, in a rhetorical figure. And you bring forward, in support of this opinion, that passage of Paul, “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and goodness of God!” (Rom. 11:33). And also that of Isaiah 40:13, “Who hath holpen the Spirit of the Lord, or who hath been His counsellor?”

You could easily say these things, seeing that, you either knew not that you were writing to Luther, but for the world at large, or did not think that you were writing against Luther: whom, however, I hope you allow to have some acquaintance with, and judgment in, the Sacred Writings. But, if you do not allow it, then, behold, I will also twist things thus. This is the distinction which I make, that I also may act a little the rhetorician and logician—God, and the Scripture of God, are two things; no less so than God, and the Creature of God. That there are in God many hidden things which we know not, no one doubts: as He himself saith concerning the last day: “Of that day knoweth no man but the Father” (Matt. 24:36). And, “It is not yours to know the times and seasons” (Acts 1:7). And again, “I know whom I have chosen” (John 13:18). And Paul, “The Lord knoweth them that are His” (2 Tim. 2:19). And the like.

But, that there are in the Scriptures some things abstruse, and that all things are not quite plain, is a report spread abroad by the impious Sophists; by whose mouth you speak here, Erasmus. But they never have produced, nor ever can produce, one article whereby to prove this their madness. And it is with such scare-crows that Satan has frightened away men from reading the Sacred Writings, and has rendered the Holy Scripture contemptible, that he might cause his poisons of philosophy to prevail in the church. This indeed I confess, that there are many *places* in the Scriptures obscure and abstruse; not from the majesty of the things, but from our ignorance of certain terms and grammatical particulars; but which do not prevent a knowledge of all the *things* in the Scriptures. For what thing of more importance can remain hidden in the Scriptures, now that the seals are broken, the stone rolled from the door of the sepulchre, and that greatest of all mysteries brought to light, Christ made man: that God is Trinity and Unity: that Christ suffered for us, and will reign to all eternity? Are not these things known and proclaimed even in our streets? *Take Christ out of the Scriptures, and what will you find remaining in them?*

All the *things*, therefore, contained in the Scriptures, are made manifest, although some *places*, from the words not being understood, are yet obscure. But to know that all *things* in the Scriptures are set in the clearest light, and then, because a few words are obscure, to

report that the things are obscure, is absurd and impious. *And, if the words are obscure in one place, yet they are clear in another.* But, however, the same *thing*, which has been most openly declared to the whole world, is both spoken of in the Scriptures in plain words, and also still lies hidden in obscure words. Now, therefore, it matters not if the *thing* be in the light, whether any certain representations of it be in obscurity or not, if, in the mean while, many other representations of the same thing be in the light. For who would say that the public fountain is not in the light, because those who are in some dark narrow lane do not see it, when all those who are in the open market place can see it plainly?

Section IV.—WHAT you adduce, therefore, about the darkness of the Corycian cavern,<sup>3</sup> amounts to nothing; matters are not so in the Scriptures. For those things which are of the greatest majesty, and the most abstruse mysteries, are no longer in the dark corner, but before the very doors, nay, brought forth and manifested openly. For Christ has opened our understanding to understand the Scriptures (Luke 24:45). And the Gospel is preached to every creature (Mark 16:15; Col. 1:23). “Their sound is gone out into all the earth” (Ps. 19:4). And “All things that are written, are written for our instruction” (Rom. 15:4). And again, “All Scripture is inspired from above, and is profitable for instruction” (2 Tim. 3:16).

Therefore come forward, you and all the Sophists together, and produce any one mystery which is still abstruse in the Scriptures. But, if many things still remain abstruse to many, this does not arise from obscurity in the Scriptures, but from their own blindness or want of understanding, who do not go the way to see the all-perfect clearness of the truth. As Paul saith concerning the Jews, “The veil still remains upon their heart” (2 Cor. 3:15). And again, “If our gospel be hid it is hid to them that are lost, whose heart the god of this world hath blinded” (2 Cor. 4:3–4). With the same rashness any one may cover his own eyes, or go from the light into the dark and hide himself, and then blame the day and the sun for being obscure. Let, therefore, wretched men cease to impute, with blasphemous perverseness, the darkness and obscurity of their own heart to the all-clear Scriptures of God.

You, therefore, when you adduce Paul, saying, “His judgments are incomprehensible,” seem to make the pronoun *His* (*ejus*) refer to Scripture (*Scriptura*). Whereas Paul does not say, The judgments of the Scripture are incomprehensible, but the judgments of God. So also Isaiah 40:13, does not say, Who has known the mind of the Scripture, but, who has known “the mind of the Lord?” Although Paul asserts that the mind of the Lord is known to Christians: but it is in those things which are freely given unto us: as he saith also in the same place (1 Cor. 2:10, 16). You see, therefore, how sleepily you have looked over these places of the Scripture: and you cite them just as aptly as you cite nearly all the passages in defence of “Free-will.”

In like manner, your examples which you subjoin, not without suspicion and bitterness, are nothing at all to the purpose. Such are those concerning the distinction of Persons: the union of the Divine and human natures: the unpardonable sin: the ambiguity attached to which, you say, has never been cleared up. If you mean the questions of Sophists that have been agitated upon those subjects, well. But what has the all-innocent Scripture done to you, that you impute the abuse of the most wicked of men to its purity? The Scripture simply confesses the Trinity of God, the humanity of Christ, and the unpardonable sin. There is

3. Ed. Note: The Corycian cavern was situated at Delphi; cf. *OCD*, 305. Luther contrasts here the clarity of Scripture and the mystery of the Delphic oracles.

nothing here of obscurity or ambiguity. But *how* these things are the Scripture does not say, nor is it necessary to be known. The Sophists employ their dreams here; attack and condemn them, and acquit the Scripture. But, if you mean the reality of the matter, I say again, attack not the Scriptures, but the Arians, and those to whom the Gospel is hid, that, through the working of Satan, they might not see the all-manifest testimonies concerning the Trinity of the Godhead, and the humanity of Christ.

But to be brief. The *clearness* [or perspicuity, *claritas*] of the Scripture is twofold; even as the *obscurity* is twofold also. The one is *external*, placed in the ministry of the word; the other *internal*, placed in the understanding of the heart. If you speak of the internal clearness, no man sees one iota in the Scriptures, but he that hath the Spirit of God. All have a darkened heart; so that, even if they know how to speak of, and set forth, all things in the Scripture, yet, they cannot feel them, nor know them: nor do they believe that they are the creatures of God, nor any thing else: according to that of Psalm 14:1, "The fool hath said in his heart, God is nothing." For the Spirit is required to understand the whole of the Scripture and every part of it. If you speak of the external clearness, nothing whatever is left obscure or ambiguous; but all things that are in the Scriptures, are by the Word brought forth into the clearest light, and proclaimed to the whole world.



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